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ABSTRACT

There are many "truths" concerning reading psychology and pedagogy that teachers accept without questioning and that play an important role in current reading instruction. However, both science and education are deeply affected by the tenor of their times, and present day answers should be regarded only as tentative propositions that may be eventually proved wrong. In considering the nature of the learner and the learning process, educators need to examine concepts of school and reading readiness, motivation techniques for children to whom reading has little appeal, and the appeal of basal readers and other classroom reading materials. They should also consider using social situations and social reinforcement in teaching reading. In the area of reading pedagogy, educators need to consider the following: ways to assure that reading becomes an important activity for children and adults, the possible use of audiovisual aids to increase interest in reading, ways to develop content reading abilities, and the impact on pupils of new reading materials rewritten to alter social and sexual depictions. Finally, with regard to the psychology of reading, researchers should develop ways to measure reading and should study such practical classroom problems as the impact of teacher behavior on learning. (GT)

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ANSWERS WITHOUT QUESTIONS*

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When I was as young as my esteemed colleague, Jaap Tuinman, who developed this program, I believed that I had all the answers. There seemed to be little need to ask questions. Now thirty years after being awarded a Ph.D. I find I have a lot of questions but fewer answers. It probably is a tribute to Jaap's scholarship that at this state in his academic career he chooses to talk about questions without answers while giving one of his old professors the topic "Answers Without Questions." On the other hand, one wonders if this is not Jaap's way of revenge for some real or imagined wrong. Credence is given to this latter point because the title is delightfully vague and he furnished no clues as to what he had in mind. Be that as it may, I have assumed that my task has been to discuss certain commonly accepted "truths" concerning reading psychology and pedagogy which we accept without further question, or have given up asking questions about or researching.

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A good starting point, it seems to me, is to reaffirm the truism that both science and education are deeply affected by a zeitgeist (the tenor of the times). Neither educators nor scientists can free themselves completely from the psychology, sociology, history which effect our culture. These factors effect not only our knowledge and beliefs but the questions we ask reading education and research are no exceptions to this influence. We accept as true that reading is good for the reader (although we also recognize that some people may be adversely affected by certain types of reading). We believe that all children should be taught to read sufficiently well to master the materials they must study in twelve years of schooling. Our conceptions of education are intimately tied to our discussions about human rights, the importance of democracy, and the development of maximum self-actualization in the individual. We also have many basic concepts concerning the nature of the learner that effects our thinking about reading pedagogy. Many of these are so vague and unstructured that it is difficult to ascertain their influence. Others are readily apparent. All play an important role in the methods and motive used to teach reading. A few of these many factors are discussed in this paper.

One further note should be stressed. Science usually progresses by small steps rather than by leaps and bounds. Small increments in knowledge rather than hugh breakthroughs are more typical of

scientific enlightenment. For every Newton, Darwin, or Einstein there are thousands of John Does and Mary Smiths who contribute small insights or glimmers of light or who more firmly anchor our understandings. In all branches of science one important aspect of research and study is a reexamination of what is known and accepted. It has been said that we progress by taking two steps forward and one backward. Certainly this is true when we examine our knowledge of the past. The "answers" we once were certain of in the past in reading education have been reassessed constantly. Forty years ago we were certain that the optimal mental age for children who could learn to read successfully should be at least six years and six months. Thirty years ago we were certain that girls learned to read with less difficulty than boys because of advantages in physical and mental development. Twenty years ago many argued that certain races were inately brighter than others. Ten years ago it was argued that language was learned and the normal sequence in mastering a language was in the progressive manner of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Hopefully, we accept our present day answers only as tentative propositions and not as absolute truths.

The Nature of the Learner and Learning

We have many conceptions about the nature of the learner and the learning process that are accepted without question. We also have a number of present day practices we have stopped asking questions about. For example, it long has been recognized that

chronological age is an inadequate index for determining readiness for school entrance. Yet, because of tradition and apparent equity, C.A. remains the major critierion for entering children who must begin the task of learning to read. Similarly despite discussions in the professional literature to the contrary, and the development of materials designed to provide "readiness," maturation still remains a major factor in success in beginning reading. We need to ask questions concerning alternate criteria for school entrance, alternate means of fostering readiness for reading, and alternate methods and materials designed for teaching children at various states of development and of various abilities.

A corrollary of the above is found in the problem of motivation. It generally is recognized that the optimal time for learning anything is when the learner finds his present abilities are inadequate to achieve a strongly desired goal. Obviously, many beginning readers find learning to read somewhat less than a highly desired task. It is apparent that many first grade children are vague about the nature of reading (Reid, 1966) and that we have badly over estimated the extent to which children recognize words as units of language. (Meltzer and Herse, 1969; Kingston, Weaver, Figa, 1972; Downing and Oliver, 1974). In addition, the existence of many non-reading adult models, the far greater vividness of and satisfaction provided by television, and the obvious power of social learning brought about by family and neighborhood social interaction create special

problems for many of our youth. For thousands of American children reading is a vague, long term, a superimposed task rather than a natural part of real life.

The importance of positive reinforcement in the learning of complex skills long has been recognized by psychologists and educators. Most teachers recognize that for most beginning readers there is little in the way of positive intrinsic reinforcement or incentive in the task of learning to read. In order to independently read most children's stories the child needs to master skills comparable to those attained at the end of second grade or the beginning of third grade. Even then one can only wonder about the excitment generated by reading many of the stories found in young children's books when compared to the vividness of television programs or movies. For many children, learning the prerequisite skills in beginning reading is only reinforced by adult approbation. Such children soon become aware that the task seems endless and that more unrewarded work lies ahead. For many children, also, the hard work in learning to read only means that he can better read his other school books, those in science, arithmetic, and social studies. For students unmotivated by school itself, such an incentive was of dubious motivating value. Obviously, we need to ask questions in this area.

Reading educators and librarians also need to continuously question the content of basal readers and other books placed in the hands of our children. Although we have made a fetish of developing

materials of "high interest," our educational materials tend to reflect the pressures of numerous groups. Publishers tend to play it safe and seek to develop content that will not alienate or offend anyone or any group of our society (Kingston and Lovelace, 1977). As most children, like most adults, are interested in themselves or their kind, one can only speculate how the bland content of most of our readers, anthologies and other literary works, attracts and stimulates our children. Few materials are given genuine field-trials and children do not vote on the contents of school books.

Finally, it must be recognized that the human is a social creature who satisfies most of his or her needs through others. It is widely recognized that we learn best in social situations and when social reinforcement is present. Although children are assigned to grades and usually to reading groups there often is little social interaction or reinforcement in learning to read. Often the pupil interacts only with the teacher who praises, corrects, or cues or looks at his basal reader or workbook, or listens to others in his group. Yet, team learning, the use of dyads, or peer grouping have been shown to be effective in many situations in regular classrooms and remedial programs at the middle school and secondary school level. Few programs have been inaugurated at the kindergarten and primary grade level with children who are beginning reading instruction and who need social interaction and reinforcement. Perhaps such programs would enhance the learning activities of certain youngsters.

Reading Pedagogy

Many professional educators believe that the illiterate is somewhat of an intellectual cripple. Few would argue about the importance of reading ability as a major vehicle for mastering the curriculum. Despite audio visual technology and other instructional devices it is generally assumed that pupils will have to read materials in the various subject areas if they are to be successful in school work. Indeed reading remains the major mode of school learning. In addition, however, many reading educators believe that the ultimate goal of reading is to help children to develop life time reading habits. Just what is meant by life time reading has never been described in functional terms (Kingston, 1968). If the purpose is to develop adults who read widely and consistently there seems to be ample evidence that we have not achieved our goals. Although we have increased the average educational attainment in the U.S.A. during the past twenty-five years, we have not significantly increased the percentage of adults who are readers. Among the aged, a group that grows numerically yearly, thousands of virtually non-readers can be found. Despite increased leisure time, greater loneliness, and often less economic resources, extensive reading among the elderly exists only among the higher educated (Kingston, 1969, 1977). One can only wonder whether we should abandon our goal of developing life time reading habits or take realistic steps to assure reading becomes an important activity in the lives of children and adults.

In the U.S.A. reading long has been recognized as an activity more feminine in nature than masculine. In the 19th Century many of the novels and poetry published were aimed at females. Even today most middle class parents tend to become worried if their school age sons spend more time reading than they do socializing or playing. We have not yet overcome the biases about recreational reading among many of the males in our society although most adults recognize that reading is a valuable tool for information acquisition. Alternate approaches to the basal reader with its story and literary approach have not been sufficiently experimented with. Projected computer assisted instruction, cassettes, and non-prose materials might be more fully exploited. Recent experiments with language have utilized many other different techniques which might be used to advantage in the classroom.

Reading achievement among pupils of the same age is highly variable. It is not uncommon to find four or five grade levels of proficiency in the same middle school classroom. As a result, there has been great interest in the development of high interest-low readability books and school texts with rigorously controlled vocabularies and style. Middle school and secondary school teachers also have been pressured to become "reading teachers." Such approaches ignore the fact that the mastery of subject content in science, social science, languages, and mathematics generally assumes that the individual student possesses the tools for dealing directly with the materials. If the teacher must serve as a

translator, or if the pupil is limited to interpreting merely one or two specially prepared materials it is doubtful whether he will receive much value from instruction in such content areas as mathematics and science. We know that many poor readers lack the necessary antecedent learning to master some of the learning tasks found in the secondary school curriculum. Finally, studies need to be made to determine more exactly just what is lost when texts and literary works are rewritten to a lower level. In any translation something is lost from the original. Little is known about the specific misconceptions any rewritten work engenders. It is widely recognized, however, that much is lost when the great works of literature are rewritten.

Previously it was pointed out that public education always has been subject to pressures from individuals and groups. Presently a number of groups are actively exerting influence upon the curriculum and materials employed in teaching. Basal readers and language arts materials particularly have been criticized by ethnic, religious, and feminist groups. As publishers seek profits they fall easy prey to such pressures. Similarly school administrators usually seek to avoid controversy. As a result in recent years readers and texts have been rewritten to alter social, sexual, occupational, and social depictions. In the midst of such massive re-writing few seem to remember that the major purpose of books is to attract and hold the attention of the learner and to provide the basis for instruction.

Little has been done to determine the impact of the newly written materials on the learner (Kingston and Lovelace, 1977-78). Children of school age have definite likes and dislikes. They enjoy reading about themselves and friends. There is danger that in our attempt to portray our idealistic world we "turn off" pupils when we should be capturing them by the vividness of our materials. Certainly we need to study more carefully the reaction of certain types of children to the content of the materials placed in their hands.

The Psychology of Reading

Because it is challenging and heavily subsidized, considerable research on the psychology of reading is being generated at present. Such research is hampered by the covert nature of the most significant aspects of reading. Recently we have become increasingly aware of the difficulties in understanding short term and long term memory, perception, and cognition. We have borrowed certain vocabulary terms and concepts from linguists and theorized about language processing from a transformational and generative viewpoint. A number of models of reading have been developed. Still we are badly hampered by terms that lack psychological reality and by measures which lack reliability and validity. The measurement of reading remains one of our most crucial problems if we are to explicate the nature of the reading process and most of our so-called models fail to provide a basis for better psychometry (Kingston, 1955).

Our present research also tends to lead us further and further away from the classroom. Recently, while serving on on the committee of the Internal Reading Committee charged with selecting outstanding dissertation I suggested that we really needed two awards: one for the dissertation reflecting the nicety of design and instrumentation found among those examining some aspect of reading psychology, and the other for one focusing on a problem of reading pegagogy. It would be a difficult task to list five or six significant research findings of the past few years that have had any real impact on reading pedagogy. Part of the trouble is that researchers are moving further and further away from the problems of teachers teaching live pupils in real classrooms. Most of us would agree that many aspects of reading behavior can best be studied in the laboratory. However, researchers should not abandon the classroom, and laboratory findings must eventually be tested in the classroom. We must bring research and classroom practice closer together if we are to advance reading pedagogy. Many examples can be cited in support of this interaction. For example, we long have recognized that teachers are important in teaching reading. Yet, we continue to focus on materials when we should be examining teacher behavior and its impact on learning. It is widely recognized that some teachers are able to stimulate children to a greater degree that others. How or why is not certain. Similarly, we have seen many children work to potential while others

don't and we don't know why. We often identify children at the first grade level who we predict will have difficulties. We usually tend to ignore the signs until it is too late. In my opinion, a rapprochment between research and pedagogy is needed. There probably are many more answers without questions. Undoubtedly, each of you have your own private list and can add many more.

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